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ABSTRACT

In his analysis of Cicero's "Philippics," Cecil Wooten (1983) describes the strategy the Roman advocate used in a rhetorical situation of national crisis as a contest of black and white, the struggle of good against evil; at stake is the very existence of the civilization that he is defending. Choices offered in crisis situations can be viewed in terms of the severity of the crisis and whether the moment of actual crisis is proximate or remote. In analyzing the logic and psychology of disjunctive reasoning, and in illustrating the analytic framework in Cicero's Fourth Catalinarian, some tentative generalizations about crises and rhetorical discourse framed in disjunctive forms can be made. Cicero used the weak disjunctive form because the form necessarily reduces and restricts an auditor's field of selection to a choice between two options. Cicero was a forensic specialist trained in a genre of oratory inherently marked by duality of choice. The weak disjunction directs an auditor to accept both options, possibly making him or her more ready to accept or comply with a real choice in a proximate moment of crisis when the disjuncts are mutually exclusive. (RAE)

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CICERO AND DISJUNCTIVE PERSUASION

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In his analysis of Cicero's Philippics, Cecil Wooten describes the strategy the Roman advocate used in a rhetorical situation of national crisis:

> To him (Cicero) the contest is black and white, the struggle of good against evil; and what is at stake, he argues, is the very existence of the civilization that he is defending. He tries to convince the members of his audience that the history of their state has reached a fundamental crisis in which its very existence as they know it and everything that it represents are in danger. He then presents the situation as a clean choice between mutually exclusive and fundamentally opposed systems by means of what may be called the disjunctive mode. (p. 58)

That Wooten sees an almost necessary relationship between crisis situations and disjunctive reasoning is not surprising. By definition any crisis--whether personal,

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organizational, or national--is an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs whose outcome will make a decisive difference for better or for worse for those directly affected by the crisis. Etymologically, the Greek word, κρίνειν means, "to decide," and any decision involves choice. Disjunctive slogans offering restrictive choices typically emerge during national crises: "Fifty-four forty, or fight!" in 1844 is the same form as "America: Love it or Leave it" that one heard in the 1970's. At its most elemental level all disjunctions offer a choice, but the choice can be apparent or real, i.e. "buy now or miss a golden opportunity," as opposed to "stop smoking cigarettes or risk lung cancer." The difference between apparent and real choices is the difference between shadow and substance. Simply framing choices disjunctively focuses, narrows, reduces, and constricts a listener's options into one of two directions. When the power of the disjunctive form, as a form, is wedded to an apparent choice, "by now or miss an opportunity," a skillful rhetor can make "the weaker case seem strong."

Then, too, choices offered in crisis situations can be viewed in terms of the severity of the crisis and whether the moment of actual crisis is proximate or remote. Wearied parents, for example, after 8 hours of interstate driving have often directed an exasperated disjunction toward the young combatants in the rear seat. "Stop fighting or we're going home!" The severity of the station wagon scenario differs both in degree and potential implications from John

F. Kennedy's message to Cuba, "Remove the missiles or we will blockade your country." Crisis situations in which the actual danger is close in real time call forth truncated disjunctions. "Bail out, we're hit," and "Abandon ship" are obvious illustrations. When the alleged or actual danger is remote in time, however, disjunctive discourse seems to lose its potency. "Repent or perish," and "Bundle up or you'll get sick," tend to fall, more frequently than not, on closed ears. Yet, portraying a future evil as if it were present has been a staple rhetorical exercise at least as far back as the language Homer directed to Agamemnon on the shores of Troy. Casting a remote danger into a disjunctive pattern would seem to require the depictive powers of a Jonathon Edwards to secure even a minimum of credibility.

While these examples of disjunctive discourse in everyday affairs are common, contemporary rhetorical handbooks -- the texts used in Speech 101 -- rarely mention the use of disjunctive forms in persuasive discourse. Apart from Wooten's treatment of the concept, however, the nature of the disjunctive mode and its suasive functions remain largely unexplored. In this paper, I propose to review the logic and psychology of disjunctive reasoning, apply the insights to a brief analysis of Cicero's Fourth Catalinarian and offer some tentative generalizations about crises and disjunctive persuasive efforts.

Logic

For twenty five years, Irving M. Copi's editions of Introduction to Logic have served as the most widely used textbook on the subject. In his discussion of disjunctive forms, Copi identifies an ambiguity that exists in the English language. Sometimes the word "or" is used in a weak or inclusive sense that actually means "both...and." His example, "Premiums will be waived in the event of sickness or unemployment," highlights the inclusive sense of the term. Critically important, however, is Copi's observation, "An inclusive disjunction is true in case one or the other or both disjuncts are true; only if both disjuncts are false is their inclusive disjunction false." (p. 282) The logical rule, depending as it does on ambiguity, offers an important concept for understanding and evaluating Cicero's use of the disjunctive mode. Rather than dismissing as pure sophistry and sham his use of forced choice reasoning, much of the time Cicero offers inclusive disjunctions in which both elements are true.

Logicians, however, are quick to remind a reader that the word "or" can be used in strong or exclusive sense meaning one or the other but not both. An example: "you may have cake or pie." Here both disjuncts can not be true although one may be. Lest I sound as a person about to sharpen Occam's razor, let me assert now and later illustrate that exclusive disjunctions, at least as Cicero uses them, seem reserved for crisis situations presented as both

real and proximate. Doing so permits him to amplify each disjunct in such a way that one choice -- his -- emerges as more advantageous and, therefore, more probably true.

One must remember, however, that disjunctions involve not only logical relationships but linguistic and psychological ones as well. Happily, the field of psychology offers some help in understanding disjunctions.

Psychology

Charles K. Ogden's book. Opposition: A Linguistic and Psychological Analysis, traces the philosophic discussions of opposition from Aristotle's Metaphysics to Tarde's L" Opposition Universelle. Since disjunctions, per se, are framed and phrased as a choice between two opposites, a more precise understanding of opposition seems needed. Ogden posits three types of opposition: scale, cut and definition. "Opposites," he claims, "may be either the two extremes of a scale or the two sides of a cut; the cut marking the point of neutrality, the absence of either of two opposed characters in the field of opposition." (pp 50-51). Examples of opposition "by cut" would be: right or left, hard or soft, inside or outside, present or absent. Examples of opposition "by scale" are top/bottom, black/white, hot/cold. Opposition by definition occurs, Ogden says, when we confront a term that admits of opposition only when it is defined. If for example, we define "man" as "rational animal" then the opposite term would be "brute.

Of central importance to the mission of this paper, however, is Ogden's demonstration that not all linguistic opposites are mutually exclusive. Many admit of degrees, i.e. "hard-soft, present - absent, hot-cold." When an orator, therefore, offers an audience a disjunctive choice between opposites that actually admit of degrees, form and content are at odds. The form of the disjunction signals one to select one of two opposed options. But, if the options, upon reflection, prove not to be mutually exclusive, the disjunction can be interpreted as an eristic trick and a failed deception. To offer opposites of scale or cut, however, as a means of recommending both choices to an audience uses the disjunctive form, I argue, as a sophisticated stylistic vehicle to highlight the substantive terms in the disjuncts. Form anchors content. One uses the double negative in a litotes, for example, not for its logical value but for emphasis and psychological pleasure.

Cicero

Cicero's final speech in the Catalinarian sequence provides a useful illustration of rhetorical disjunctions. The sheer brevity of the speech sets it apart from Cicero's more usual displays of copia. Then, too, the speech meets the conditions for an address delivered at a time of national crisis. Rome had indeed narrowly escaped a serious civil uprising at the hands of the conspirators and their followers. Also, the Fourth Catalinarian places Cicero into

an actual, real, irreversible, and necessary choice-making context. The case itself forced Cicero to confront the disjunction of "life or death" for the imprisoned conspirators.

In Catalinarian IV Cicero addressed his Fourth Catlinarian the Senate on 5 December 63 B.C. to secure their approval for the death penalty. With the conspirators held under arrest no imminent danger to Rome was present. Several senators, Silanis and Cato, demanded execution; Caesar argued detention for life. For Cicero, a double-edged crisis emerged. If he argued for execution of Roman citizens, he would break the law which afforded citizens the right of appeal to the assembly. If he argued for detention, the conspirators could be freed to rekindle civil disorder and war.

The speech itself separates easily into a half-dozen recognizable elements. Addressing his fellow Senators, he begins (Sec. 1-3) with an extended disjunction, "Think of your own selves or me." Cicero follows (Sec. 4-6) with a second disjunction linking his auditors' concerns most immediately with the case at hand, "think of the security of the State or the threat of the prisoners." No doubt, rhetorical reasons alone if not the audiences' prior knowledge of the state of affairs, accounts for Cicero's placement of the real disjunction--"choose death or life in prison"--directly in the middle of the speech (Sec. 7-11). Here, something akin to a dispassionate analysis of the two disjuncts occurs. Issues of equity are counterposed to issues of safety. Issues of clemency are juxtaposed with issues of

cruelty. One might say that Cicero's handling of the advantages and disadvantages of each disjunct is characterized by prudent wisdom. One cannot say this, however, because the next ten sections contain a torrent of vintage Cicero. To a blood curdling vision of civic slaughter and panic he adds a ministerial decree that all the social classes are solidly united under the celebrated leadership of one M.T. Cicero. He ends his peroration (Sec. 24) with a final disjunction, "cherish my memory or protect my little son."

If we look carefully at the two opening disjunctions, "think of the security of the State or the threat of the prisoners," and if we include Cicero's concluding disjunction, "cherish my memory or protect my little son," we can make several observations. Logically, all three are inclusive rather than exclusive uses of the form. None of the three involve mutually exclusive choices. In fact, the opposite is true. Cicero wants all of the choices accepted by his fellow Senators. Psychologically, the opposites he offers are what Ogden describes as "opposites of scale" and as such admit of degrees. In point of fact, for instance, one could "cherish my memory and protect my little son," or one could do more "cherishing" and less "protecting" and still be doing some of each.

In each of the three cases of disjunction we are presently considering, the choices are apparent, not real, and the actual moment of crisis is remote, not proximate. The question now becomes more complex and more intriguing: Why

might Cicero be using the disjunctive form and using it repeatedly, in its weakest, least compelling configuration?

Several answers present themselves.

As an accomplished stylist Cicero had to know that certain forms invite certain mental responses in listeners. An interrogation invites a reply; vivid portraiture invites empathic response. I submit that Cicero used, and apparently used habitually, the weak disjunctive form because the form itself invites choice. Even used in its weak, inclusive form the "either...or" formula necessarily reduces and restricts an auditor's field of selection to a choice between two options.

I am less confident of my second answer but it does seem to have some surface validity. Cicero was a forensic specialist and, as such, he was trained in a genre of oratory inherently marked by duality of choice. One's client is guilty or innocent; a punishment fits or does not fit a crime; testimony is true or false. Mastering such a system would probably tend to instill a set of habits involving the frequent use of the disjunctive mode.

A final answer deserves mention. Rhetorically, Cicero's use of the weak disjunction can serve strategic ends as well as stylistic flourishes. The weak disjunction, in fact, directs an auditor to accept both options. Thinly veiled as a real, exclusive choice, disjunctions such as Cicero used in the Fourth Catalinarian function as commands, polite and never imperious to be sure, but commands nonetheless. As commands to select both choices, both of which

tend to be doable, pleasant, correct, etc., auditors conceivably are more ready to accept, follow, agree with, and possibly comply with a real choice in a proximate moment of crisis when the disjuncts are, in fact, mutually exclusive.

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the logic and psychology of disjunctive reasoning, illustrates the analytic framework in Cicero's Fourth Catalinarian, and offers some tentative generalizations about crises and rhetorical discourse framed in disjunctive forms.